

## Road kill predation by a Children's Python *Antaresia childreni* (Serpentes: Boidae) at Adelaide River, Northern Territory

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Traditionally, most species of snakes are thought to prey upon live items and the idea that they could consume carrion has typically been ignored (DeVault & Krochmal 2002). However, a review by Devault and Krochmal (2002) found that members of the Colubridae, Viperidae, Acrochordidae, Boidae, and Elapidae consume carrion on a more frequent basis than originally thought. Although most snakes in captivity will accept dead prey items, the extent to which they consume carrion, particularly road kill, in the field is largely unknown. Among the Australian snakes, road kill predation has been observed in *Tropidonophis mairii* (Bedford 1991a), *Pseudechis australis* (Bedford 1991b), *Aspidites melanocephalus* (Bedford & Griffiths 1995), *Antaresia stimsoni* (Switak 1989), *Boiga irregularis* (Torr & Richards 1996) and *Morelia amethystina* (Anderson 2000). Here we report on the observation of road kill predation by a Children's Python *Antaresia childreni*.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006 we observed a female *Antaresia childreni* (snout vent length 582 mm, total length 641 mm, weight 55 g) (Figure 1) on Dorat Road, Adelaide River (13°32'11"S 131°12'51"E) at 20:30 hours during light rain. Upon closer inspection of the *A. childreni* we observed it swallowing a road killed agamid lizard *Lophognathus gilberti*. The *L. gilberti* was not fresh and appeared to have been killed hours before as most of its body had been repeatedly run over by motor vehicles. The *A. childreni* was observed to swallow the prey and once it had completed its meal we then moved it safely off the road.

Most species of snakes are thought to locate their prey visually by either active foraging or sit-and-wait predation. Pythons of the genus *Antaresia* are known to consume a wide array of vertebrate prey (Bedford 2003, Shine & Slip 1990) although published records of predation by this genus are rare. With the large number of roads throughout Australia, road kill predation probably occurs more than is noticed. As most species of snakes will readily accept dead prey items in captivity there is probably no reason why they would not in the wild, and this observation provides further evidence that some species may supplement their regular diet with these items.

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Figure 1. Children's Python *Antaresia childreni* and road killed *Lophognathus gilberti*.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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